

Derderians start education fund for children

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The owners of The Station nightclub say they hope the fund helps offset school-related expenses for the nearly 80 children who lost parents in the 2003 blaze.

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The owners of The Station nightclub, site of a 2003 fire that killed 100 people, have formed a charity to defray educational costs for the nearly 80 children who lost parents in the fire.

Jeffrey A. Derderian, one of the brothers who owned the West Warwick nightclub, said the Station Education Fund is the first of several planned efforts to "provide some measure of solace to all those affected." He declined to say what else the brothers have in mind.

The fund hopes to provide tuition money for the children, as well as cover the cost of extras associated with school years, such as yearbooks, athletic equipment, field trips, art supplies, prom

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gowns, books and tutoring, Derderian said. Children will be eligible from kindergarten through college.

"We're just trying to do some good," Derderian said, adding he was "hopeful that we can make a difference in these kids' lives. They've been through a tough, tough time."

The fund will raise money through a variety of events, he said, listing carnivals, golf tournaments and letter-writing campaigns as possible examples. The fund's first event, a motorcycle ride and stunt show called "Revving up for Kids," has been scheduled for Sept. 30.

Derderian and his brother, Michael A. Derderian, each pleaded guilty to 100 counts of involuntary manslaughter last September. Mi-

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chael, 46, was sentenced to serve four years in prison. Jeffrey, 40, was sentenced to perform 500 hours of community service. Work on the fund will not count toward the community service, he said.

The Station caught fire Feb. 20, 2003, when a rock band's fireworks ignited highly flammable polyurethane foam that the Derderians had placed on the building's walls as soundproofing after neighbors complained about noise.

Jeffrey Derderian said his brother had the idea to start the

education fund almost three years ago. "When we were able, this is something we should be doing." He said Michael was "very involved" in running the fund, even though he is behind bars. The Derderians are joined in organizing the fund by Jody King, the brother of Tracy King, a bouncer who died in the fire. The three men's wives are also involved. They made an initial contribution of an undisclosed amount to start the fund.

The fund also has a 15-member advisory board that will help plan fundraisers and other activities. The advisers include event planning professionals, educators and businesspeople. Jeffrey Derderian identified three of the advisers: businessman Bruce Lang, former radio personality Mary-Ann Sor-

rentino and Gordon Weiss, of UNICEF.

The fund sent out letters to eligible families at the beginning of the month, Derderian said. It directed them to a Web site, where they could review plans for the fund. The Web site will become available to the public next Thursday at www.stationeducationfund.org. The Web site will also have information for people who want to participate in "Revving up for Kids."

Derderian said families have reacted favorably to the creation of the fund. "So far it's been positive," he said. "It's been very positive."

Not all would agree with that assessment.

Diane Mattera, 55, of Warwick,

has been raising one of her two grandsons after her daughter, Tammy Mattera-Housa, died in the fire.

"Somebody took my daughter's life, and now they want to give me money for my grandson's notebooks? No," Mattera said yesterday. "I just could not take their money. It's tainted. It's tainted with my daughter's blood."

"Others say they should be paying," she added. "I don't think I want to get involved with anything the Derderians have to offer. To me, it's like blood money."

The Station Education Fund is not associated with the Station Family Fund, a separate charity set up by fire survivors.

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